

March 6, 2017

EVICTING THE EPA? TRUMP'S MEDIA BLACKOUT FUELS UNCERTAINTY SURROUNDING THE FUTURE OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

BY JEANA MASON

Just a few days after becoming president, Donald Trump rashly decided to implement a complete media blackout at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).[i] In addition to the media freeze, the President forbid EPA staff from awarding any new contracts or grants.[ii] The email sent to EPA employees read, "New EPA administration has asked that all contract and grant awards be temporarily suspended, effective immediately. Until we receive further clarification, which we hope to have soon, please construe this to include task orders and work assignments." [iii] The announcement of the blackout coupled with President Trump's looming nomination for the EPA Administrator, Scott Pruitt, has sent the media into a frenzy, and further, has caused anguish among scientists, state and local officials, universities, and Native American tribes that often benefit from the EPA's grants.[iv] Across the country, EPA employees have protested the nomination of Pruitt.[v] This controversy comes from the fact that Pruitt has close ties with the fossil fuel industry and has openly denied the existence of climate change.[vi] The fears of EPA employees and supporters may be warranted in light of the fact that Pruitt has made headway on the President's plan to "get rid of" the EPA entirely.[vii] His plan includes intentions to repeal climate change rules, cut staff, close regional offices, and permanently weaken the agency's regulatory authority.[viii]





The EPA is responsible for protecting the environment by passing regulations, giving grants to environmental programs, studying environmental issues, working with local businesses and government organizations, and educating Americans on the environment.[ix] The EPA distributes more than \$4 billion funding grants and other assistance programs each year.[x] Thus, freezing the grants could affect climate research, local communities, air and water quality, and even environmental justice projects aimed at assisting those living in poor neighborhoods.[xi]

The President has also instituted social media bans at the Department of Health and Human Services and the Interior Department, which oversees the National Park Service.[xii] Across the country various groups have protested and advocated against the media freeze. One of the National Parks, Badlands National Park in South Dakota, began tweeting facts relating to climate change in response to the media ban.[xiii] The tweet was later removed after it was discovered that an unauthorized person had posted to the account, however, not before an explosive reaction by the twitter community.[xiv] The response by the National Parks Service to delete the tweet spawned the creation of several rouge National Park accounts.[xv] Among these accounts was the AltUSNatParkService which gained over 600,000 followers in just 24 hours.[xvi] These new twitter accounts are claimed to be run by National Park rangers and have continuously posted facts relating to science and climate change.[xvii]

On February 3, 2017, the Trump Administration lifted the freeze on EPA grants and contracts.[xviii] Although the media blackout seems to be relaxed, the agency still has not used social media accounts to communicate with the American public.[xix] However, all grants have progressed normally and no funds have been denied, at least in the interim.[xx]

The American public needs to stay aware and updated on current climate and environmental threats. Even though operation of the EPA has proceeded normally, the function and purpose of the EPA could change drastically with the appointment of Scott Pruitt as the EPA Administrator. The EPA provides a vital and irreplaceable service to the United States by preserving the health and safety of the American people and the environment. It would be a true shame to see it go up in flames.

[i] Michael Biesecker and John Flesher, *Trump Admin Orders EPA Contract Freeze and Media Blackout*, Associated Press (Jan. 24, 2017), http://hosted2.ap.org/APDEFAULT/3d281c11a96b4ad082fe88aa0db04305/Article_2017-01-24-US--%20Trump-Agencies%20Crackdown/id-b0ffc88403b4412195d8c3e06d0f090b.

[ii] *Id.*

[iii] Brady Dennis and Juliet Eilperin, *Trump Administration Tells EPA to Freeze All Grants, Contracts*, Wash. Post (Jan. 24, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/01/23/trump-administration-tells-epa-to-freeze-all-grants-contracts/?utm_term=.a1700fb990fa.

[iv] *Id.*

[v] Samantha Page, *Scott Pruitt Hasn't Even Been Confirmed and EPA Employees Are Already Protesting*, ThinkProgress, <https://thinkprogress.org/epa-urges-against-pruitt-f389471b300#7f0o8v3zs> (last visited Feb. 7, 2017).

[vi] Ryan Schleeter, *3 Things Scott Pruitt Has Actually Said About Climate Change*, GreenPeace (Dec. 7, 2016), <http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/3-things-scott-pruitt-actually-said-climate-change>.

[vii] Coral Davenport, *Scott Pruitt Is Seen Cutting the E.P.A. With a Scalpel, Not a Cleaver*, N.Y. Times (Feb. 5, 2017), <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/05/us/politics/scott-pruitt-is-seen-cutting-the-epa-with-a-scalpel-not-a-cleaver.html>.

[viii] *Id.*

[ix] *Our Mission and What We Do*, Env't Prot. Agency, <https://www.epa.gov/aboutepa/our-mission-and-what-we-do> (last visited Feb. 7, 2017).

[x] Dennis, *supra* note iii.

[xi] *Id.*

[xii] Wynne Davis, *Rogue National Park Accounts Emerge On Twitter Amid Social Media Gag Orders*, Nat'l. Pub. Radio (Jan. 25, 2017), <http://www.npr.org/sections/alltechconsidered/2017/01/25/511664825/rogue-national-park-accounts-emerge-on-twitter-amid-social-media-gag-orders>.

[xiii] *Id.*

[xiv] *Id.*

[xv] *Id.*

[xvi] *Id.*

[xvii] *Id.*

[xviii] Michael Biesecker, *Trump Team Relaxes EPA Restrictions on Media and Contracts*, Associated Press (Feb. 3, 2017), <http://www.mercurynews.com/2017/02/03/trump-team-relaxes-epa-restrictions-on-media-and-contracts>.

[xix] *Id.*

[xx] Brady Dennis, *Trump Administration Lifts Temporary Freeze on EPA Grants*, Wash. Post (Jan. 30, 2017), https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2017/01/30/trump-administration-lifts-temporary-freeze-on-epa-grants/?utm_term=.d9f16d8658d3.

♥ 0 Likes ➦ Share

COMMENTS (0)

Newest First Subscribe via e-mail

Preview POST COMMENT...

Newer Post

Legality of Insuring Marijuana: Where There's Smoke, There's Fire (/full-blog/williamsblog2)

Older Post

Got Milk? Changes in Pasteurization on the Horizon for Milk Processing Extending Shelf-Life (/full-blog/keckblog1)

SEARCHABLE ARCHIVE (/PUBLICATION-ARCHIVE-1)

631 SOUTH LIMESTONE, LEXINGTON, KY

40508 (859) 257-4747 BLOG.KJEANRL@GMAIL.COM (MAILTO:BLOG.KJEANRL@GMAIL.COM)